



doi 10.5281/zenodo.7820768

Vol. 06 Issue 04 April - 2023

Manuscript ID: #0816

## THE PHELPS-STOKES REPORT AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: IMPERATIVE FOR RELEVANT CURRICULUM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

OGEH, OBITOR WIZOMA MATTHEW (*Ph.D*)

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, FACULTY OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF  
PORT HARCOURT. E-mail: Sirobis1@yahoo.co.uk

ALFRED, DAKORU OSOMKUME (*Ph.D*)

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, FACULTY OF EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF  
PORT HARCOURT E-mail: Osonkume1@gmail.com

*Corresponding author:* \*OGEH, OBITOR WIZOMA  
*Email:* Sirobis1@yahoo.co.uk

### ABSTRACT

The paper discussed the role of the Phelps-Stokes commission on the educational development of African British dependent colonies, especially Nigeria. The first aspect of the paper considered missionary education and its characteristics; which was mainly evangelization and the conversion of African souls to Christ through education. The second part of the paper highlighted the British Colonial government lackadaisical attitude to African dependent colonies education as provided by the missionaries. The Colonial government encouraged and condoned educational practice that educated Africans away from their culture and environment. The authors maintained that it was the poor attitude of the British colonial government to African education that encouraged underdevelopment of the people that led to the establishment of the Phelps-Stokes Commission in the 1922. However, the findings of the commission jolted the British colonial government into action that brought about Memorandum of education that emphasized the adaptation policy; making education relevant to the needs and environment of the people. The authors maintain that just as the Phelps-Stokes report stimulated positive changes that led to a high water mark in the educational system of the African British dependent territories; positive changes can also be achieved in the present Nigerian educational practice to encourage sustainable development in Nigeria.



## **MISSIONARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

Before the year 1925, the British colonial government had no defined educational policy for her dependent African colonies. Rather, the local administrators in consultation with the local Christian missions and their home offices managed the educational enterprise as best as they could. Laissez fair was the order of the day. Since the main aim of Christian missionary endeavour in Africa (Nigeria) was evangelization and proselytization- to win African souls for Christ. To accomplish this all important task, education was seen as the major tool as reflected in the curriculum of the missionary schools. Udoh (2010), maintains that the missionaries were interested in raising pious, godly teachers who would minister to the needs of their own people. As a result of this very objective, the church and the school were almost the same thing. The two worked together and complemented each other.

Almost everything taught in the missionary schools was linked to the bible. Fafunwa (2004), maintains that the knowledge of the bible, the ability to communicate both orally and in writing were considered essential for a good Christian. Consciously or otherwise, the missionaries hoped to produce group of people who were Nigerians only in blood but Europeans in religion, thought and habit; a sort of white-men in black skin. Bakindo, Omolewa and Babalola(1994), also affirm that the development of Western education gave rise to a new class-the westernized African elite; these were men and women who had secondary, teachers or university education. In most cases the westernized educated Africans got converted to Christianity and took European names as Christian names.

Schools were established haphazardly; at any available space, under the trees, town halls and poorly staffed and ill equipped. This indiscriminate establishment of schools according to Ogeh(2018), led to unhealthy rivalry amongst the missionaries. When Sir Clifford took over from Lord Lugard as the Governor of Nigeria, he inherited the problems of many unassisted schools. Fafunwa( 2004), maintains that the earliest Christian missionary school in Nigeria was without any doubt an adjunct of the church. Schools were indiscriminately opened by missions, private Nigerians individuals and organizations. There was unhealthy rivalry and competition among the Christian missions, as missions were determined to outpace the other in terms of the number of schools and areas covered in evangelical work. The religious rivalry led to many land disputes among religious bodies and this preoccupied Sir Clifford from 1922 to 1923. Fafunwa (2004) maintained that the number of unassisted schools continued to grow, rising from 2,432 with 122,000 pupils in 1922 to 2,584 with 162,000 pupils in 1923. Such was the educational scene in Nigeria when in 1920, the Phelps-Stokes Fund of the USA; in cooperation with the international education Board (IEB) set up two commissions to look at the educational activities in the British Tropical African colonies.

## **THE IRELEVANCE OF BRITISH COLONIAL EDUCATION TO AFRICANS DEVELOPMENT**

It is well known that colonial education policies limited opportunities for the education of the indigenous people to the mere acquisition of skills for occupation that supported the functioning of the colonial system: typist, administrative clerks, customs officials, low ranking policemen, medical orderlies and elementary school teachers. Barongo (1983), maintains that education for the natives during colonial era was kept narrow, superficial and virtually censored. He argues that Colonial education was targeted or directed towards the wrong goals; it was focused on creation of urban-based institutions oriented towards interaction with western capitalist institutions. Chikwendu(1983)in Barango(1983), also maintains that in order to maintain unequal relationship, education has remained relatively conservative and stagnant, geared to the needs and self-image of a restricted elite. .

According to Chikwendu, education lost its dynamic innovative and change oriented potential in the colonial educational practice.

Discussing the relevance of African traditional indigenous education Rodney (1974) posits that one of the functions of education is to promote social change. Pre-colonial African education was relevant to Africans; it had close link with social life; and it was directly connected with the purpose of society. By contrast colonial education did not grow out of African environment, neither was it designed to promote the most rational use of material and social resources, it was not an educational system designed to give confidence and pride to young people as members of African societies. Instead, colonial schooling ‘was education for subordination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion and the development of under-development.’

Collaborating Rodney, Nyerere (1968) in his (President Nyerere of Tanzania) hard assessment of the educational system inherited from colonial powers, maintains that our education should have a proportionate relevance to the society Africans are trying to create, but colonial education educated Africans away from the environment and society. In his post Arusha policy directives, ‘titled Education for self reliance’, he maintained that the purpose of education ‘is to transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society and to prepare the young people for their future membership of the society and their active participation in its maintenance or development.’ However, a look at the educational system practiced under colonialism shows that the system was inadequate and inappropriate for developing agrarian society.

Chikwendu, in Barongo (1983) furthers the argument by saying that Colonial education was also considered to have divorced its participants from the society it was supposed to be preparing them for. According to him, the neglect of the peasantry and their agricultural occupation originates in the colonial value system which assigned a low value to manual activity and a high value to white –collar bureaucratic work. Fafunwa(2004),describes the situation thus that the education given to the Africans had been too literary and too classical to be useful; that at the end of the school course, the school-leavers were still not fit to meet any of the definite needs of the community except possibly those employed as clerks for commercial houses or those who became teachers. In his word “there had been over production of those who could write and under -supply of those who could till and repair”

Chikwendu (1983), concludes by saying that the determining curriculum and syllabus at any level of education for a developing society, must focus on how that education would contribute to the improvement of the life of the majority, the rural peasantry .However, given the missionaries emphasis on Christianizing the Africans through education and the government laissez-faire attitude to the education of her African dependent colonies, the colonial education for the colonies was left with much than was to be desired in meeting the development needs of Africans

However, Ogeh(2014), maintains that though several attempts were made by the British colonial government to manage education effectively, but not much was achieved. By the year 1912, there was an Imperial conference to consider how best the education of the British dependent colonies could be improved at the instance of the International Education Board.(IEB). Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of the World War 1, the effort of the IEB at improving the education of the British African dependent colonies did not see the light of the day. Kosemani and Orubite( 2010), maintained that after the World War 1, the initiative to invest and improve on the education of the British African colonies did not emanate from Britain, rather the initiative came from America. This was as a result

of the activities of some missionaries in America, interested in the education of the Negroes in America and in the Diaspora especially, the Baptist Foreign mission conference of North America.

### **THE PHELPS-STOKES COMMISSION**

The Phelps-Stokes Foundation was a voluntary Philanthropic Trust Fund of the USA, established in 1914, by Miss Caroline Phelps-Stokes. The foundation was interested in the religious and educational affairs of Africans; but not willing to invest in the education of African without first of all, making inquiry of the needs and resources and educational opportunities in Africa. At the instance of the Baptist Foreign Mission Conference of North America in collaboration with the International Education Board(IEB), two commissions were set up in 1920. The first commission studied education in the West, South and Equatorial Africa and in 1922 published a report entitled 'Education in Africa'. The commission was headed by an American sociologist, Thomas Jesse Jones of the famous American Negro College, Hampton Institute Virginia.

Other members of the commission consisted of persons who were knowledgeable in Negro education, in America and Africa. The commission undertook preliminary study in Both America and Europe. Fafunwa (2004), maintains that the commission also discussed with Governors, Commissioners, administrators, ministry officials (in education, medicine, agriculture prisons) educated and uneducated Africans, lawyers, and clerks, teachers and preachers, women and girls parents and guardians. Besides others, the commission was mandated to discover whether the education of boys and girls was in touch with the actual development of the country; the educational work, needs, with special reference to religious, social and hygienic and economic conditions and to make full report of their findings on the extent these needs are been met. Kosemani and Orubite(2010), maintain that the commission met with every shade of opinion in Africa and even held conferences with chambers of commerce and representatives of trade in order to get support for the research. The commission also visited many schools and gave oral examinations to the pupils.

### **THE FINDINGS AND REPORT OF THE COMMISSION**

After a period of about two years of expedition, the commission discovered that among other things, that the record of the colonial government in Africa is a mixture of the good, and the bad, the effective and the ineffective, the wise and the unwise. It further observed that serious educational facilities in Africa were credited to missions, but regretted that many of the missions could not adapt education to the condition and development of the African people; which has led to opposition to education in Africa. Obsolete School methods in Europe and America were still in vogue in Africa and lack of organization and supervision.

The first commission studied education in the West, South and Equatorial Africa, and in 1922 produced a report entitled Education in Africa. According to Fafunwa (2004), the commission also observed that there was lack of cooperation among the three groups that represented 'European and American Civilization'-government officials, missionaries and traders.

The commission in its report indicted the British colonial government for its lackadaisical attitude to Africans education; and made some recommendations that jolted it into positive action.

### **THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMISSION**

Based on the findings of the commission, some recommendations were made to improve Africa education as to make it relevant to the environment and needs of the people. The commission

recommended that education in the British colonial African territories should be adapted to the needs and environment of the people. It recommended that given the fact that Africans lived both in rural and urban areas, education provided for the people should be such that would enable them meet their needs in both environment; the commission recommended agriculture for those in the rural areas and industrial or technical skills for those in the urban areas. The Commission also recommended that school curriculum for the rural community should be made to blend intimately with the life of the people and generate respect and interest in the rural environment from where the pupils those make up the population of the schools resides.

It further recommended that objectives for African education should be clearly stated and subsequently, schools should be thoroughly supervised to ensure that the stated objectives are been achieved. The commission also recommended that to develop a sound mind, good character and interest in agriculture or industry, the local language of the pupils should be used as a medium of instruction; and that health education be given to the pupils, the home and the community (Fafunwa2004). It also emphasized for more educational opportunities for women. On higher education the commission recommended for advanced technical and agricultural education for teachers training colleges to meet the short supply of teachers in the schools, medicine, law and theological schools to be established to make African education a complete system (one).

## **GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

Given the outcome of the Phelps-stokes commission's report that castigated the British colonial government at its lackadaisical attitude to the education of its African dependent colonies, the colonial government as it were, for the first time, made a definite education policy that led to the fluorescence of education in the British Tropical African colonies. Fafunwa (2004), maintains that the report of the Phelps-Stokes commission had a tremendous impact on both sides of the Atlantic- Africa and Britain. The 1925 education policy by the British colonial government otherwise referred to as the Memorandum of Education, the first of its kind, was an outcome of the Phelps-Stokes commission report. The 1925 memorandum on education emphasized the principles and manner on which the educational systems in the British African dependencies should operate. One of such principle was the Adaptation policy advocated by the British colonial government.

The colonial government also set an Advisory Committee in the colonial office in London on Native education in British Tropical African Dependencies, to control and monitor educational activities in her African dependent territories. The 1925 Memorandum was immediately followed by the 1926 education code. Among others, the memorandum recommended that education should be adapted to the local conditions, mentality, aptitudes and traditions of the people; while at the same time serving as an instrument of progress and evolution. Agada(1991) in Okonkwo(2019),maintains that the government policy also provided that importance be attached to religious teaching, moral education, education for girls, the training of quality teachers and teaching of the pupils in the native languages and the provision of textbooks in the vernaculars .Yusuf (2014) Amaele (211), also maintain that the memorandum also provided for technical and vocational education to be carried out by the government and also encouraging pupils in the rural areas to engage in agricultural and nature study. While persons in the urban area should be encouraged to engage in commercial and technical subjects.

Fafunwa(2004), maintains that the 1925 memorandum provided educational blueprint for educational development in Nigeria from 1925to 1945, which was responsible for accommodating the varied

shades of person in the British dependent colonies and eventually provided for the establishment of institutions of higher education which subsequently metamorphosed into universities.

### **RELEVANT CURRICULUM FOR SUSTAIABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

The Phelps-Stokes commission report and the response of the British colonial government marked a high tide in the development of education in the British African Colonial Territories. Significant in the policy of the British colonial policy on her African Dependent territories was the Adaptation Policy, which emphasized that education should be adapted to the environment, nature, cultural, religious, physical emotional and psychological status of the persons concerned; and not simply the strait-jacket transfer of the British educational practice and policies to Africa-Nigeria. Looking at the contemporary socio-economic formation of Nigeria and the challenges of unemployment, youth restiveness, kidnapping for ransom, stealing and pipeline vandalism; calls for a total reevaluation of the Nigerian education system. It is imperative to observe that many of the youths engaged in pipeline vandalism and kidnapping for ransom are university graduates and some school dropout who see no relevance in the education they have so far received and the realities of life challenge they are faced with every day. The Nigerian socio-economic formation as it stands today has no provision for the absorption of these teaming graduates from the secondary and higher institutions; who are mainly equipped with reading and writing skills. The time has come not just to reevaluate the educational curriculum to the situation and realities of the time, but to specifically deemphasize the idea of certification and focus on the acquisition of relevant skills that will encourage life-long survival in the environment. Education for sustainable development places a high demand on the Nigerian educational planners to provide the school system with the curriculum that will be relevant with the 21<sup>st</sup> century digital and information age that can translate every skill and information acquired from the school to money to meet present need of man. Education for sustainable development has to educate students and at the same time; equip learners with the ideas, skills and knowledge of meeting their present need in the environment without putting at risk the chances of the future generation from meeting their own needs. Education for sustainable development should equip learners with environment friendly attitudes and versatile skills that will be responsive to environmental challenges that can led to more productivity; thereby encouraging development and sustainability. Educating children to acquire versatile skills and knowledge that will be enduring will have to begin from the nursery schools were children will be tracked to identify their gifted area of interest and develop same as they progress in their educational pursuit. In this way the Nigerian educational system will prepare the Nigerian youth for future membership of the society and active participation in its development.

## REFERENCES

- Abdulrahman, Y.M.(2014).Nigerian Educational History And Policy: The beginning of the Past, Past of theFuture. Port Harcourt.Uche's Business Services. Nigeria.
- Agada, J.C.(1991).*The Phelps-Stokes Commission*. In Okokwo,C.E., Agada, J.C., Uruakpa,J.A.&Kanu, O.R.(1991) Basic Issues in History of Education.Owerri. Grace of God Printing and Publishing Co.
- Amaele, S.,Wosu, J.I., Ejire, A,N. (2011). History of Education:From Ancient to The Contemporary Era. The Global and Nigeria Perspectives. Port Harcourt. Harey Publications Coy.
- Barkindo, B.,Omolewa, M.& Babalola, G.(1994).Africa and the Wider World 3: Africa Since the Scramble. Lagos. Longman Nigeria Limited.
- Barongo, Y.R. (1983). Political Science in Africa: A critical Review. London. Zed Press.
- Chikwendu, E (1983) The African Peasantry: Neglected by African Political Science. In Barongo, Y. R. (1983). Political Science in Africa: A Critical Review. London. Zed Press.
- Fafunwa, B.A.(2004). History of Education in Nigeria. London George Allen & Unwin Limited
- Kosemani, J.M &Orubite, A.K.O (2010) . History of Education: A Contemporary Analysis. Port Harcourt. Abe Publishers.
- Nyerere, J.K. (1968) Freedom and Socialism. London. Oxford University Press.
- Ogeh, O.W.M(2018). *Introduction To The Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Education* .InNyewusira, B. (2018). Introduction To Courses in Pre-Degree Programme in Education.(Ed).College of Continuing Education, University of Port Harcourt.
- Rodney, W. (1974) How Europe Underdeveloped Africa. Washington D.C. Howard University Press.
- Udoh, E.N.E.(2010). A Sociology Of Education For Africa: A Comparative Study. Uyo. Saviour Publishers